

Improving Your Certification IQ:

Choices for Woodland Owners

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BRINGING up the topic of green certification of forests or forest products at your local woodland meeting will likely ignite a firestorm. Some say certification is just one more form of outside regulation. Just one more person telling landowners what they “should” be doing with their lands. Some landowners notice the environmentalist links to certain certification schemes and are suspicious of the motives involved. On a more positive note, others see certification as an opportunity to get credit in the marketplace for doing an excellent job of forest stewardship. Whatever your perspective, this article will increase your certification vocabulary, help you see how forest certification schemes are continuing to evolve, and point out which schemes are currently available to you.

Whatever the perspective, the discussion over certification is growing. Companies, landowner groups and others are lining up behind their favorite systems. Time will tell which systems survive and what form they will take. Certification, with all its new words and terminology, seems to be with us for some time to come.

Evolution of Forest Certification Schemes

The idea of certification has been around woodland circles for some time. In 1941, the American Tree Farm System was set up with the certification of Tree Farm #1 on Weyerhaeuser Company lands in Washington State. Although the Tree Farm System was not set up in response to pressures from the marketplace like some current schemes, membership has always been limited to properties that have been inspected by a forester and verified actively managed.

Since the early 1990s, there has been an influx of new certification and certification-like systems. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Canadian Standards Association, American Forest and Paper Association, International

Standards Organization, and National Forestry Association have all have systems designed for use in North America. Worldwide, many more organizations are designing their own systems, including a very large scale one called Pan-European Forest Certification being developed for woodland owners in Europe.

As schemes have matured, many of them have begun to modify their system to include woodland owners. The FSC network, through its certifiers, currently offers landowners the option of sharing participation costs with other landowners through a consulting forester that has become certified. Both SmartWood and Scientific Certification Systems offer this option. In addition, the AF&PA is currently developing a version of their Sustainable Forestry Initiative that will include small landowner participation. The American Tree Farm System is also retooling their program to offer landowners a more rigorous certification option than in the past. Finally, the Green Tag certification system designed specifically for small private forest owners is being refined by the National Forestry Association.

Schemes Available to Woodland Owners

While it is good to know about forest certification schemes around the world, the most important ones to you are the ones that are available locally. Woodland owners in the United States currently have the opportunity to participate in three, possibly four different certification systems. Table 1 lists the key features of the various systems in a comparative format based on current rules for each system. For specifics on each of the criteria and systems, contact the sponsoring organization. Some criteria are easy to compare, while others are very different, or not addressed by all of the systems.

Why Certify?

Ultimately, this is the question that

you will find yourself asking. Unlike large corporations that are subject to attack by environmental groups, woodland owners generally have a fairly good image with the public. It is unlikely that environmental groups will attack the small owner. Of course this could change, but there is a certain nostalgic attraction to the family owned forest. It is probably a sacred cow that the environmental advocates will leave alone.

Markets may be the best reason for considering certification. If you want to sell products, you will likely do so by selling logs to a mill. If mills are being pressured into certified markets, then you will have to follow suit, or chance losing markets. While this is not a reality at present in the United States, it is becoming an issue in parts of Europe, particularly Scandinavia. Some large American forest product retailers such as Home Depot have also announced their intention to sell certified forest products within the next couple of years. If they follow through on their promises, it will cause forest products companies to certify, and to buy logs from certified properties. Watch what your local companies are doing with certification; it could have a big impact on your future log sales.

Another reason to certify is the professional advice that comes with it. The process of certification includes a review of your operation by a forester or a team of forestry professionals. The insights you receive will be valuable information to confirm what you are doing well and point out opportunities to improve management. Don't underestimate the value of the process.

Choosing a Certification System

If you decide to certify, you will need to select the system or systems that best fit your needs. If you want to gain market access or advantage, then find out what systems are being recognized by your log purchasers. To date, the only systems that

can provide chain-of-custody and eco-labels for the ultimate customers are the FSC and Green Tag, although Green Tag has yet to prove its system in the marketplace. SFI may be important for you if you sell logs to an SFI-certified company because of provisions that require knowledge of forest practices on lands of purchased timber. Check with your log buyer to see if SFI will be important for

this service. If you pass the inspection, you will receive a Tree Farm sign and another free inspection every five years thereafter. The TREASURE Forest program is similar.

On the other end of the cost and detail spectrum is the FSC assessment, which will include a team (usually three) of forestry professionals. The team will do some data collecting ahead of a one- to

woodland property, depending upon size of your ownership. You will also be assessed an annual audit fee. Another option under this system that is growing in popularity is the certified resource manager program, where consultant foresters become certified, and spread the certification costs over a number of small woodland owners, greatly reducing this assessment cost.

For information on specific Certification Systems contact:

1. Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Forest & Paper Association, Washington, DC; Phone: 202-463-2700.

2. American Tree Farm System, American Forest Foundation, 1111 19th Street, Washington, DC; Phone: 202-463-2462.

3. Green Tag Forestry, National Forestry Association, Washington, DC; Phone: 888-503-6737.

4. Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Washington DC; Phone: 877-372-5646.

U.S.-based FSC Verifiers:

1. Scientific Certification System (SCS) Oakland, CA, Phone: 510-832-1415.

2. SmartWood Network; check for your local affiliate on the Internet at www.smartwood@ra.org; Phone: 212-677-1900.

Table 1: Major Forest Certification Systems Available to Woodland owners in North America.

Program	Tree Farm	FSC	Green Tag	SFI
Sponsor	American Forest Foundation	Forest Stewardship Council	National Forestry Association	American Forest & Paper Association
Scope	National	International	National	National
Year Established	1941	1994	1998	1995
Region specific rules	Somewhat	Yes	Somewhat	No
Type of certification system	Performance	Performance	Performance	Performance
System rules development	2nd party	3rd party	2nd party	2nd party
Third-party verification	Yes	Yes	Yes	Optional
Direct costs for 3rd party verification	Minimal	Expensive	Moderate	Expensive
Eco-label and Chain-of-custody	No	Yes	Yes	No
General Performance Measures				
Compliance with existing laws	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Requires written forest management plan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Public availability of certification summary	No	Yes	No	Yes

future log sales to their company. The Tree Farm Program still provides the opportunity to get a free inspection from a professional forester, a quarterly magazine and the ability to publicly advertise your active management by displaying the Tree Farm sign, but is not generally connected to the marketplace. The TREASURE Forest program in Alabama has similar benefits to landowners, but again, the program is not connected to the marketplace.

What to Expect During the Certification Process

If you sign up for the Tree Farm program, your certification process will consist of a field visit from a professional forester. Usually a walk around the property will generate productive discussion and a short written report of ideas from the forester. You will not be charged for

two-day field visit. They will also interview consulting foresters, neighbors, log buyers, state forestry officials and others that can tell them about your management. Eventually, you will get a detailed report on how your management compares with the FSC certifier's set of detailed performance standards. Their report will identify management practices you "must" and/or "should" change to become certified. If you agree to their conditions, then you can sign a five-year certification contract. You will then be contacted each year to ensure you are following the certification contract. You are then free to market your wood as certified under the FSC system, and the particular certifier (SmartWood and Scientific Certification Systems are the two U.S.-based FSC certifiers). For this initial assessment, you will probably pay about \$4,000-\$6,000 for a single small

Green Tag and SFI systems are still too new to know the exact procedures and costs that may be associated with their use. To find out more about how they would be applied to your property, contact the sponsoring organization.

Current Certification Issues and Debate

At the heart of the current debate about the various systems is what constitutes "good" management. Although sustainability is purported to be a central issue in most certification schemes, no one seems willing or able to find consensus on what forest management strategies will lead to long-term sustainability from economic, ecological and social perspectives. The FSC currently has 14 regional guideline groups engaging a broad array of stakeholders throughout North

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America. Much work remains, as they have yet produced many rules that have local consensus and FSC approval.

Equity has also been a major concern, particularly for the non-industrial private forest owners that hold about 60 percent of all the forestland in the United States, and up to 90 percent of the forest in some European countries. A certification scheme that requires setting aside stream-side areas for fish habitat, biodiversity or

other non-timber uses can have a devastating economic impact on a 40-acre forest owner.

Globalization of the forest industry and mergers creating multi-national forestry corporations are pushing the certification industry away from parochial schemes, based within individual countries, and toward regional and international schemes. Many governments, wary of trade implications, are con-

cerned about the development of schemes that may create non-tariff trade barriers.

The recent entry of large, multi-national accounting firms into the certification arena is also a noteworthy development. In some respects, there is little difference between auditing business records and auditing environmental performance. Look for these large players to add credibility, professionalism and cost to the current certification schemes.

So, how is your certification IQ? Hopefully this article has helped you see the options more clearly. As certification schemes mature, they will continue to play a role in forestry. Whether you decide to participate now, or watch from the sidelines, the future should bring ample opportunities to reevaluate your options. 🏠

Rick Fletcher is currently associate director of the Sustainable Forestry Partnership and professor in Forest Resource, College of Forestry, Oregon State University, Corvallis. He wishes to recognize Mark Rickenbach, University of Wisconsin, Madison, for work on a joint article that this was adapted from.

Certification Terminology

Assessment: The process of determining if a forest operation meets the criteria for a particular certification scheme.

Chain-of-Custody: The process of tracking wood from the time it leaves the forest, along the processing and marketing channels, to the final consumer.

Eco-label: Proprietary symbol used to identify a product that has been produced with a given environmental standard.

First-, Second- and Third-party Certification: Refers to who sets the standards and administers the certification system. If done by self, it is considered first party. If done by a trade organization it is generally considered second party. If done by an independent organization, it is third party.

Performance-based: Qualification for certification is determined by assessing applicant performance against a set of performance measures set by the certifier. **Systems-based:** Qualification for certification is determined by examining the environmental management system that an applicant is using to manage their forest, and determining its compliance with the certification scheme.

Verification: Process of verifying compliance with a set of certification criteria. Note that verifications can be done by a first, second or third party. This is also sometimes called an audit.

Promote and Support the TREASURE Forest Program Join the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association

The Alabama TREASURE Forest Association is composed of people who practice TREASURE Forest management, people who encourage others to practice it, and people who believe that management of Alabama's forestlands according to the TREASURE Forest concept is good for both present and future generations.

Membership in the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association is open to certified TREASURE Forest owners (Full Members), any forest landowner who is not certified (Growing Member), and persons, companies, corporations, or organizations that do not own forestland (Associate Member), but want to support and promote the sustainable and wise use of our forest resource for present and future generations.

☐ Yes, I would like to join the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ County: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____ Telephone: (____) _____

Check each category and fill in the blanks as appropriate:

☐ Associate Member

☐ Enclosed is \$20 annual membership fee

☐ Growing Member

☐ Enclosed is \$25 annual membership fee

☐ Full Member

☐ Enclosed is \$30 annual membership fee

Primary objective: _____

Secondary objective: _____

Mail to: Alabama TREASURE Forest Association, P.O. Box 145, Chunchula, AL 36521

For more information about the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association contact James Malone, Executive Director, at (334) 442-2424.